

***Baltimore City Conference on
“Emergency Preparedness and Response for Individuals with
Disabilities and Special Needs” April 28, 2005***

Summary Report-Approved-7-13-05

On April 28, 2005, the Maryland Department of Disabilities (MDOD), Baltimore City Office of Emergency Management, Mayor’s Commission on Disabilities, and the MDOD consultant, the Disability Preparedness Center (DPC), held a conference in and for Baltimore City focused on the emergency preparedness of individuals with disabilities and other special needs. More than 96 people participated, and the feedback evaluating the conference was overwhelmingly positive. Participants included emergency planners and responders, persons with disabilities, service providers such as operators of group homes, private employers, government officials, advocacy groups, and others.

The Baltimore City conference was co-sponsored by numerous Maryland State agencies, including the Maryland Emergency Management Agency, the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Governor’s Office of Homeland Security, the Governor’s Office on Service and Volunteerism, and the American Red Cross.

The Baltimore conference emphasized networking, communication and planning built around issues and problems in emergency preparedness and response for people with special needs as identified by the conference participants. The issues and problems most frequently identified by those attending were:

- Communications of all kinds need to be improved to reach and get feedback from people with special needs.
- How can medications/ treatment plans (such as dialysis) be sustained during and after an emergency incident?
- How will many people with special needs be evacuated from the city if a major emergency occurs? And where would they go?
- Individuals with special needs and their advocates need to be recruited and supported to actively participate in city and institutional planning processes and response activities.
- Site based emergency plan development is needed for group homes and other institutions serving groups of people with disabilities, including better coordination with emergency responders and planners.
- Do public spaces in the city have adequate plans/ evacuation procedures?
- More practice implementation of plans is needed.
- Individuals and responders need to be more aware of individual needs.
- Individuals with disabilities must take more individual responsibility for preparedness.
- Is the city prepared to provide supports in emergencies, e.g., attendants?
- How can Baltimore City handle the cost of being prepared?
- More community support and involvement of neighbors with neighbors is needed.
- Evacuation from high-rise buildings.
- Transportation during evacuation.
- Identification of special needs.

- Adequate supplies assembled.
- Shelter assistance.
- Notification/ shelter location information.
- Service animals and pets.

Conference participants directed their attention to practical next steps needed to respond to the issues they identified. Many individuals and organizations that participated in the conference suggested that they will begin to take practical steps to improve preparedness for persons with disabilities within their particular jurisdiction or within particular organizations, such as group homes. Officials also made commitments to improve communication, cooperation, and coordination through inclusive planning and practice. Many participants agreed that planners, responders and agencies are already fully committed to activities required by law or regulation, and for more initiatives to happen more funding and technical support is necessary.

Conference Outcomes

- Conference participants produced lists of concrete concerns about current and future preparedness and response, including concerns about insufficient participation in planning by individuals with disabilities and their advocates.
- Many of the 96 attendees reported new information or ideas to their organizations, which may ultimately use them to improve their organizational preparedness and increase participation in planning by people with disabilities.
- Some participants have explored establishing a regional planning council for Baltimore City to improve communication and coordinate preparedness efforts in the city.
- New networks for communication and cooperation were facilitated among individuals with disabilities, emergency responders and planners, service providers, and others.
- As a result of the Baltimore City Conference, and the six other regional conferences, Maryland has become known as an example for other states interested in improving their emergency preparedness, response and recovery to be more inclusive of their citizens with disabilities and special needs.

The vision driving this project is of a Maryland in which all citizens have equal opportunities to be well prepared for any disruptive emergency, including realistic supports they need to receive warnings of events, shelter at home or work, evacuate if necessary, be accommodated at emergency shelters, and recover as fully as possible from the event. The Baltimore City conference made a good start towards realizing that vision for the City of Baltimore, and with adequate support and funding further efforts to realize the promise of this beginning can be made. Next steps could include the following:

- Establish a regional planning council in Baltimore to include individuals with disabilities and other special needs and major players from various agencies and organizations to develop and implement concrete plans for emergency preparedness training for individuals with disabilities and other special needs.

Ultimate goal would be to establish Neighborhood Preparedness Councils in the City of Baltimore.

- Involve individuals with disabilities and special needs in emergency planning.
- Provide expert technical assistance and training to public and private institutions and agencies with emergency responsibilities that include people with disabilities (such as emergency planners and responders, disability advocacy groups, and service providers like group homes, day programs, and providers of in-home aides).
- Create channels for community organizing around preparedness, response, and recovery activities.
- Improve public communication to special needs audiences and the institutions that serve their emergency needs.
- Address key concerns, such as medication supplies, sheltering in place supports, and transportation for evacuation to public shelters.

With steps such as these, Baltimore City could become a model of inclusive preparedness and response for other urban center cities in the United States.

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